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SUBJECT: MEDIA REACTION REPORT - Iraq U.S. Issues - NSA

Taps Putin and the West

PARIS - Monday, May 15, 2006

(A) SUBJECTS COVERED IN TODAY'S REPORT:

Iraq
U.S. Issues - NSA Taps
Putin and the West

B) SUMMARY OF COVERAGE:

A potpourri of stories is featured on today's front pages, with Liberation devoting its lead to domestic politics and the collateral damage from the Clearstream scandal. The motion to censure the government introduced by the Left, which is to be voted tomorrow, received the support of the UDF, a center-right party of the Parliamentary majority, and its President Francois Bayrou. Liberation headlines: "The Right Blows Itself Up" and Le Parisien headlines: "The Right's Suicide." The weekend paper Le Journal du Dimanche devotes its lead to an exclusive interview with General Rondot who says he "will not answer the judges injunction to answer questions" about his role in the Clearstream affair. All media report that Interior Minister Sarkozy "has every intention of staying in the government."

Le Figaro leads with "The Da Vinci Code," its world premiere at the Cannes Film Festival on Wednesday and the religious controversy it has triggered, and carries a second lead story on the Foreign Ministry's plans to promote French culture around the world, spearheaded by a new agency called Cultures-France. This is the top story for La Croix which interviews FM Douste-Blazy: "One way to promote French culture is attract more foreign students: in the past six years the number of foreign students has grown by 60%. The countries of the Maghreb are another important resource we intend to concentrate on."

Sunday's Le Journal du Dimanche interviews Foreign Minister Douste-Blazy on helping the Palestinians: "It is imperative to keep a humanitarian crisis from adding to the economic and social crises because it will cause chaos. To this end we feel that the funds must transit through an international institution to be handed to the Palestinian Authority and Mahmoud Abbas, whose efforts we support. The EU will give its green light tomorrow, and we hope that our partners, the Americans in particular, will also give their agreement on this fiduciary system. We need to go as fast as we can. At the same time we must continue to work on Hamas to bring it around to give up violence, recognize Israel and accept the Oslo accords. On Iran, we have yet to agree on deterrence measures. But the answer lies in a negotiated solution within a multilateral framework. All diplomatic avenues must be explored in order to keep the Middle East from being destabilized."

In Le Figaro a full page report describes Kurdistan as "A Haven of Peace in the Iraqi Hell" while Liberation reports: "Bush May be Eavesdropping on its Citizens A Little Too Much." (See Part C) The article gives the results of the Newsweek poll showing that 53% of Americans think the NSA has gone too far, while 41% consider eavesdropping a necessary tool to fight terrorism.

In Le Journal du Dimanche Gilles Delafon devotes his analysis to Putin, his energy policy and relationship with the West. (See Part C) Deputy Chief of Mission Karl Hofmann who visited Marseille on Friday says in an interview in regional La Provence: "We must take Putin's reactions seriously, for it means that we have offended him. We are indeed concerned about Russia's energy policy, a policy that also concerns Europe. This is why we must work together in matters of geo-strategy."

(C) SUPPORTING TEXT/BLOCK QUOTES:

Iraq

"A Haven of Peace in the Iraqi Hell"

Thierry Oberle in right-of-center Le Figaro (05/15): "In Iraq's ocean of violence, the countryside around Kirkuk is

a haven. inhabited by contradictory aspirations. While the Kurds voted for the Iraqi Constitution and try to bridge the gap between Shiites and Sunnis, they all have the same dream of an independent Kurdistan. But the gap born from decades of oppression separating Kurdistan from Iraq has now become an abyss. And while Kurdistan is far from a center of modernity, it is a protected area for thousands of Iraqis. And depending on who is talking, a showcase of the new Iraq or a mirage and an exception. But, if the process towards independence continues, it will not be a walk in the park."

U.S. Issues - NSA Taps

"A Little Too Much Eavesdropping"

Laurent Mauriac in left-of-center Liberation (05/15):

"President Bush tried on Saturday to defuse the controversy over stored phone listings saying that this was not a case of eavesdropping but rather of fighting against Al-Qaeda and that nothing illegal was involved. This new controversy comes at the worse possible moment for President Bush: Michael Hayden who has just been named to head the CIA, was head of the NSA when the eavesdropping program was implemented between 1999 and 2005."

Putin and the West

"Hitting Too Much on Putin."

Gilles Delafon in right-of-center Le Journal du Dimanche (05/15): "In one more slight to the West, Putin welcomed the less than commendable Uzbek President to his summer residence over the weekend. With this gesture Putin wants to show the world he expects to stay in charge of what goes on in his own backyard. This is one more, clear message to the U.S. which has called Russia on its human rights and energy policy. Reducing Putin's rhetoric to an exercise in domestic policy would be a mistake because his main intent is to show that Russia has once again become a major power. And he is right. Since the fall of communism, this has never been so true, thanks mainly to oil and energy revenues. Putin's desire to make Russia a military and economic power on par with other major powers is legitimate. Many western observers agree that the West has everything to lose by being aggressive with Moscow, opening the door to Russia's rampant populism and bringing into the Kremlin, after Putin's departure in 2008, true xenophobes who will be even more difficult to manage." STAPLETON